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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 000878

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: RABBANI REBUFFS TALIBAN OVERTURES, HIS GOALS ARE  
POLITICAL

Classified By: CDA Chris Dell for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: The opposition United Front assures us that its leader Burhanuddin Rabbani recently rejected Taliban overtures inviting a military alliance against the Karzai government. The Taliban overtures follow the United Front's increasingly vocal criticism of the Karzai government, Rabbani's recent outreach to low-level insurgents, and United Front's calls for talks with senior Taliban leaders. The Taliban seems to have misread those initiatives. Rabbani highlighted to the Charge on April 10 that he is committed to reconciliation efforts led by the government. In the lead-up to elections, Rabbani, who is again being mentioned as United Front's likely candidate for the presidency (and will certainly need to endorse whoever the candidate is) joins others who are critical of Karzai's failure to show progress on reconciliation. The United Front also recognizes the issue as an opportunity to establish its credibility among Pashtuns disaffected from the government. End Summary.

Taliban Approaches Rabbani  
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¶2. (C) According to United Front Spokesman Hussain Sangcharaki, the United Front recently rejected Taliban overtures regarding an alliance against Karzai's government. Sangcharaki said the Taliban approached bloc chairman Rabbani directly. According to Sangcharaki, Rabbani described the Taliban communication as an ultimatum. The Taliban, he said, urged the United Front to join the military campaign against the Karzai government. While Rabbani had declined to name the Taliban members behind the communication, he called them, the tone of their message, and their goal "unacceptable." Rabbani reportedly made it clear he was not interested in further contact on the issue of a Taliban-United Front alliance.

Rabbani Has His Own Agenda; It's Political  
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¶3. (C) The Taliban overtures fit into their efforts

to strengthen their support base in the North, outside of their traditional strongholds. It also appears to reflect misunderstanding of Rabbani's recent outreach. Even in the opposition, Rabbani is included in the group of recognized "wise men" Karzai assembles when he seeks to forge a consensus on major issues, as in, recently, the election law and calendar. He has re-emerged as the United Front's likely presidential challenger to Karzai. Rabbani is not shy about criticizing Karzai. His newspaper 'Erada' has, for the past two months, excoriated the government, coalition forces, the United Nations and the British. His recent outreach to low-level insurgents and his calls for talks with senior Taliban can be read as signaling increased willingness to challenge the President politically.

¶4. (C) Criticism of Karzai aside, Rabbani does support reconciliation. During a meeting with the Charge on April 10 he opened the meeting by saying that press reports about his discussions with the Taliban were misleading. He underlined that, while he does believe there are many Taliban who would welcome the opportunity for reconciliation, he does not support separate discussions outside those undertaken by the government. He claimed he had told Karzai directly that the President has done too little on reconciliation and to build national unity.

¶5. (C) These remarks track with Rabbani's recent interview in the UK-based Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, where Rabbani said, "The Taliban are not a homogenous entity; there are the diehards and extremists as well as moderates with whom you can have dialogue and understanding." Rabbani recently told PolCounselor he supports efforts to

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reform, strengthen and expand the PTS (the government's official reconciliation program) to allow it to serve as a more appealing and effective alternative to the many disaffected Pashtuns who would like to reintegrate into Afghan society. His comments were an implicit criticism of current PTS Chairman Professor Mojadeddi's limited appeal, but they underline Rabbani's interest in forging a political connection with those Pashtuns disaffected from or at least disappointed in the Karzai government.

What Taliban Overtures Tell Us

¶6. (C) The Taliban's military weakness, coupled with its perception that alienated ex-mujahideen are growing tired of the Western presence, may have been the catalyst for Taliban overtures to the United Front. Ex-mujahideen, many of whom can still call upon militias in the north, would represent a prize for Taliban leaders struggling against coalition forces in the South and lacking a developed military capability in the North. Reported Taliban outreach to other northern constituencies, including Junbesh leaders (who tell us they also rebuffed the overtures) indicate the Taliban is indeed motivated by a need to bolster their resources.

DELL